

Ms. Marlene H. Dortch
Secretary
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Ms. Dortch,

I have been involved with the Deaf community for 16 years, and have worked as a video relay interpreter from Nov 2008-Aug 2010 and from Sept 2011-Nov 2012. As an advocate for the Deaf community, freelance interpreter, video relay interpreter, and interpreting PhD student at Gallaudet University, I am writing to express my concerns about the recent plans the FCC announced for video relay (CG Docket No. 10-51).

When I left my video relay job in 2010, I only did so because I was leaving the country for a year. At the time the community was concerned about recent cuts to interpreting reimbursements. When I came back into the industry, I noticed several disturbing trends. I believe further cuts and changes will only increase these trends.

When I left for the first time, VRS was a leader in pay for interpreters. Now it pays only 2/3 of what a certified interpreter makes in my community. Although many of us love VRS work, we literally cannot afford to spend more than a few of our weekly work hours there. While, the remaining interpreters are still qualified at this point, I believe that further cuts will reduce the pool of qualified, and able, interpreters to the point that the Deaf community will not be getting the service they deserve.

Another change I have noticed is the sheer amount of calls I receive as an interpreter. I typically do not have any time to take a breath and set myself between calls because they come so much more quickly than they did before. This has happened because companies must keep all interpreters on the calls and schedule fewer interpreters in order to reduce costs. This means we must work shorter shifts so that we don't hurt ourselves physically. It also means that our brains are on overload because we can't clear out our thoughts between calls, thus leading to less capacity for the next caller.

I have also seen fewer opportunities for training and certification because the companies cannot afford to provide as much as they did before. This means that interpreters who interpret mostly in the VRS arena simply have fewer opportunities to improve their skills. Further cuts would most likely eliminate this entirely. That is scary for me as an interpreter educator. I know the serious need for further education once my students are out of their college programs, but I'm afraid this will no longer be an option if they desire to be VRS interpreters.

The interpreters I know are ethical, motivated, and dedicated to the welfare of those we serve, so we want to participate in making VRS a viable option for all parties. I hope that the FCC and VRS companies can work together to increase trust all around, and make it feasible for VRS to continue to be a high quality communication mode for the Deaf community. I have seen several options proposed, such as allowing time for a common platform to be created before revisiting the rates, or including marketing and business operating expenses in the rates to a greater extent. Please analyze these, and other options, before proceeding with any changes that will result in decreased service for those we have all chosen to serve.

Sincerely,
Laura Maddux, MA
NIC Advanced
BEI Advanced
PhD candidate